

# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH GEN PAUL J. KERN COMMANDING GENERAL, U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND (AMC)

*Interviewed by Army AL&T Managing  
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**Army AL&T:** What do you hope to achieve during your tenure as AMC Commanding General?

**Kern:** First and foremost, AMC will provide a broad range of support to the Army, particularly in view of the vast number of worldwide missions in which the Army is now involved. A major challenge, of course, is to effectively integrate all of our various support efforts. These efforts involve many organizations, including research, development, and engineering centers, and the program, project, and product managers supporting the Objective Force initiative.

Additionally, AMC is providing and storing ammunition for all the Services in support of the war on terrorism. For example, the bombs that the Air Force drops in Afghanistan are from McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, McAlester, OK, while some munitions are being provided by Tooele Army Depot, Tooele, UT. Domestically, AMC is also supporting the war on terrorism and clearly protecting the public through its chemical demilitarization effort. Actually, DOD's chemical demilitarization efforts are being integrated by AMC.

Thus, what I hope to achieve is continuous support in all of these areas as well as the improvement of our depot, supply, and maintenance operations and the way we support the U.S. Army and the other Services.

**Army AL&T:** Thinking "outside the box" has long been a key part of your philosophy. How do you plan to apply that philosophy at AMC?

**Kern:** Actually, we've already begun. For example, we recently distributed a strategic plan that encourages people to find new ways of doing business better. In addition, as we are speaking here today, the Association of the U.S. Army is sponsoring a logistics symposium that—for the first time ever—includes a discussion panel with our research and development laboratory directors. This is an important development because in the past, we tended to view many of our logistics issues as supply problems when in fact they



are really design problems that should be addressed by engineers.

To be quite candid, I selected an individual to tackle the design problem who is neither a government worker nor an engineer. He is an architect who runs a small firm in Michigan that has supported a number of our efforts, including those in the Offices of the Project Manager, Theater High Altitude Area Defense and the Program Manager, Chemical Demilitarization. Because he's an architect, he puts his emphasis on designing for people. In contrast, our engineers put their talents to work on designing to solve military-related problems. In combination, these perspectives allow us some creative thought about how we can support our soldiers better by thinking of new ways to solve problems.

We are also leveraging the expertise of our Reserve component people who are on Active duty. For example, at Red River Army Depot, Texarkana, TX, we have a young officer who, in his civilian work, created some lean manufacturing lines that are now being used at Red River. Further, we're taking that effort and expanding it throughout the entire command. Corpus Christi Army Depot, Corpus Christi, TX, and Anniston Army Depot, Anniston, AL, are two other sites where it is being applied.

**Army AL&T:** AMC headquarters (HQ AMC) is being reorganized. Could you comment on this initiative?

**Kern:** Effective May 1, 2002, AMC headquarters was provisionally reorganized to resemble Army headquarters in terms of having a G-1 through a G-8. People are a little surprised, however, that we don't have a G-4 (logistics element) at HQ AMC. Our response is that we already view ourselves as the Army's logisticians, and we provide ongoing support to the Army in that area.

**Army AL&T:** Establishment of a new AMC Research, Development, and Engineering [RD&E] Command is also said to be on your drawing board. What is the purpose of this new command?

**Kern:** I'm very excited about creating this command. I want to emphasize too, that Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White, Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki, and Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology [ASAALT] Claude M. Bolton Jr. are solidly behind it. The real benefit of this new command is that it will significantly help us transition our basic research efforts—all the way through to our engineering work—into fielded equipment for our soldiers. AMC's RD&E Command will also ultimately help other organizations such as the Army Training and Doctrine Command in better defining requirements to solve recurring problems in the field.

I want to note also that our researchers are absolutely brilliant. In fact, last year during a 50-year celebration of Army Research Office achievements, it was announced that more than 25 researchers the Army has sponsored are Nobel Prize recipients. That's pretty impressive.

**Army AL&T:** A large percentage of DOD's civilian acquisition workforce will reportedly be retirement-eligible between now and 2005. How will this development impact AMC's mission, and what is your game plan for dealing with it?

**Kern:** This is probably the biggest concern that I have because more than 96 percent of AMC's employees are civilians. As we have reduced the size of the Army and, accordingly, AMC, we have created an organization that encourages employees to stay on longer, which makes it difficult to hire replacements. Everyone focuses on the average-age issue, but the real challenge is the very small number of qualified replacements. Thus, I must recruit civilians for our organization while they still have the opportunity to learn from the people who have worked here for 20 or more years. Before those people retire, they must be able to pass on their expertise to another generation. If I don't recruit individuals and fill the impending big personnel gap with people under the age of 40, we're going to wake up 5 or 10 years from now and no one will be here.



Our research and development people are canvassing the universities, talking to student researchers to ensure that they understand there is a job for them in the U.S. government and that they can continue much of their same research. Many of today's young university students don't even know that they can work for the Department of the Army as a civilian.

AMC is also working with the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for help with apprenticeship and intern programs. We may also need some new legislation to preclude further personnel cuts that could result in the loss of the people who we just hired. This was a problem in the past. For example, we had fairly robust apprenticeship and intern

programs in the late 1980s, but when the Quadrennial Defense Review reduced our staff, those individuals were some of the very first people to be cut.

One of my key challenges, in addition to recruiting and incentivizing people to come to work for the government, is to ensure that we can retain them in the future. Another challenge is how to make the command more effective with fewer people. This will probably require greater communications and improved collaboration.

**Army AL&T:** What is AMC's role in America's war on terrorism?

**Kern:** AMC has multiple roles in the war on terrorism. First, let me say that virtually any item our soldiers use has involved AMC. This includes ammunition, food, clothing, and even the vehicles our soldiers ride on such as helicopters, wheeled vehicles, and tracked vehicles. AMC also conducts the basic research used to develop these items and also provides supply and sustainment services in support of them.

Protecting AMC installations is another AMC role in support of the war on terrorism. In fact, almost 2,500 Reserve component soldiers are specifically assigned to this task. In addition, AMC is assisting numerous other government organizations in areas where we have some real expertise, such as biological and chemical weapons defense. AMC probably has the world's leading experts in these two areas.

Our logistics support role is also very important. For example, we recently welcomed back some personnel who were in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan setting up supply and support bases. These people installed pipelines, established camps, and provided technical support. Whether it's Apache helicopters or special armor developed to save our soldiers' lives, AMC has played a role through its operational elements.

We are also working to ensure that our pre-positioned equipment is adequately supported. AMC runs and monitors the pre-positioning ships and supply depots where equipment is stored to ensure the equipment is correctly organized and maintained for any future operations.

Finally, we are working closely with the Central Command to make sure that our people can adequately respond to any supply and maintenance shortcomings. In short, there probably isn't any part of the war on terrorism, whether it's at home or abroad, that doesn't include some of our people.

**Army AL&T:** Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White has indicated that being at war is no excuse for not implementing reform of the Army's business practices. What business practice reforms do you envision for AMC?

**Kern:** I envision continuous business practice improvements. For some time, we have worked to create enterprise solutions to replace older software management tools that are used in the supply system. Two highly successful examples of these enterprise solutions are the Single Stock Fund and the Wholesale Logistics Modernization Program. Our reorganization initiatives that are underway and the new AMC Research, Development, and Engineering Command, which I discussed earlier, are some of the other business practice improvements.

At the request of Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki, we also established a logistics task force headed by MG N. Ross Thompson, Commanding General, U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, and BG Jeanette K. Edmunds, Director of Sustainment, Office of the G-4. The purpose of that task force is to develop a logistics transformation plan that will address processes, organizations, and business practices throughout the Army.

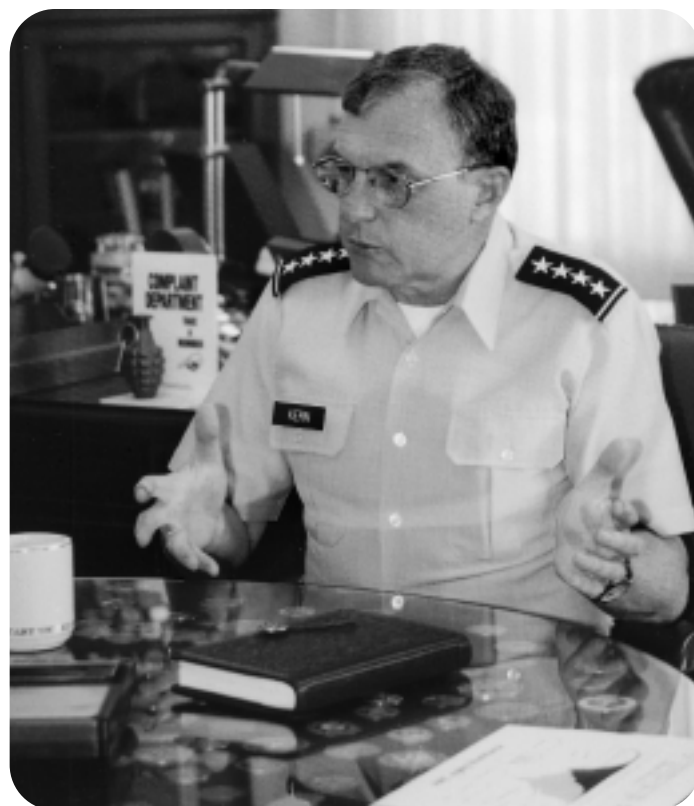
The strategic plan that I cited earlier also includes organizational business process changes. In addition, we are establishing lean manufacturing at a couple of our depots and we fully intend to train everyone on how to apply it.

We are also exploring how the other Services are doing their reforms, how we can help them, and how we can apply their reforms to meet our requirements. For example, I, along with other members of the Army leadership, recently visited with the Marine Corps to discuss their reform efforts. I also traveled to the Naval Air Systems Command at Patuxent River, MD, to discuss our aviation systems.

Further, AMC is a very active participant in the Joint Logistics Board, chaired by Diane K. Morales, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel Readiness. She has originated a number of initiatives we are involved in that will change all of our business processes and enhance our enterprise solutions.

**Army AL&T:** In view of the current turbulent world environment, what advice would you offer to someone who might be considering a career in the Army acquisition workforce?

**Kern:** I'd tell them to go for it! It's an exciting field, and we have never had a greater number of emerging technologies that can be applied to meet our warfighting requirements. In fact, we just started a basic research effort in nano- and microtechnologies at MIT, and we're doing research in modeling and simulation at a newly established center at the University of Southern California. In addition, we are continuing development of our Future Combat Systems, the Objective Force, and a major virtual information system that will allow us to better view all aspects of the battlefield, from logistics to operations.



I believe that all of these initiatives—in addition to system recapitalization efforts—offer individuals tremendous career opportunities and the chance to vastly improve our country's security.

**Army AL&T:** Is there anything else you would like to address?

**Kern:** Prior to joining AMC, I served in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology [OASAALT]. That office published a recommendation that called for placement of all program executive officers and program managers under the OASAALT. As such, when I arrived here at AMC, I was concerned about the potential negative impact that action might have on AMC's workforce and mission. However, based on what I've seen since I arrived, I am very confident that we are on the right track. I am also encouraged following a recent meeting I had at the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command with Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology Claude M. Bolton Jr.; Military Deputy to the ASAALT/Army Acquisition Corps Director LTG John S. Caldwell Jr.; and LTG Charles S. Mahan Jr., G-4. That meeting resulted in a general consensus that the acquisition and logistics communities can best solve problems through a combined effort. In other words, a *we-they* scenario will not get the job done. It must be an *us* approach.

It will also be necessary for individuals in different career fields, such as certified acquisition managers, scientists and engineers, and logistics personnel, to work together, to better organize, and to integrate processes. Although some people view all of this as a challenge, I view it as an opportunity to achieve a great deal. I really believe we have a tremendously talented pool of people who, by working together, will make a huge difference for the Army.